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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7543
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1164
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4708
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8252
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5814
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1579
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1573
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000349

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: PRYING OPEN THE DOOR FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

RANGOON 00000349 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The OFDA DART team will not be granted visas "for the moment" and other missions are having mixed success obtaining entry for their disaster assistance experts. The GOB turned back 62 medics that arrived on a chartered relief flight from Bangladesh. The UN has had mixed success off-loading and delivering relief supplies to the Delta, has made some progress obtaining permission for international staff to travel to the region, and made more progress establishing a UN relief headquarters there, staffed by local UN employees. This evening, WFP headquarters announced it would suspend relief shipments to Burma until further notice after the GOB refused to release supplies from a WFP relief flight to the UN. The UN recognizes that GOB cooperation is far short of what should be expected in a catastrophe, and became more direct and frank in its public statements to increase pressure on the GOB to accept the help the Burmese people desperately need. End summary.

¶2. (C) Although the MFA notified Embassy Rangoon that the OFDA DART team will "for the moment" not be granted visas, a few embassies and humanitarian assistance organizations received them. Two members of the UNDAC team were permitted to enter Rangoon, while two were turned back because they were traveling on Laissez-Passer documents rather than UN passports. The EU humanitarian assistance agency, ECHO, was granted visas for four of their disaster relief experts to visit Rangoon for three days. UK assistance agency DFID received visas for four of their staff, and the MFA granted visas for four IFRC international staff.

¶3. (C) Foreign relief workers have not been welcomed. On May 8, a chartered flight of relief commodities arrived from Bangladesh accompanied by 62 medical personnel. The commodities were off-loaded by the GOB, but the medics were denied entry. Singapore, Thai, and Russian aid workers have also been denied visas. In a meeting today with UN Resident Coordinator Dan Baker, the Minister of Social welfare said, "as for aid workers, we are not ready to receive them." He added that particularly applied to staff of INGOs. The Deputy Foreign Minister told Charge the same: We have turned down many offers, but for the time being, no experts. Despite this rhetoric, many INGOs are working with their

regular contacts at line ministries to facilitate visas for international staff or encouraging them to come on tourist visas. Despite promise that the Foreign Ministry would designate one official to facilitate visas, the UN has had to depend on their line ministries, observed Chris Kaye of WFP.

14. (C) The Minister of Social Welfare has not been able to give the UN an answer on how they can get their supplies to the field. In this regard the UN has had some success, and much frustration. The WFP reported that the seven metric tons of high-nutrition biscuits it brought in on a commercial flight on May 8, were off-loaded to the UN warehouse without problems. The UN delivered the biscuits, along with 20 metric tons of food to Labutta today in its trucks. However, today the GOB refused to let the UN receive supplies from a chartered WFP relief flight. consequently, WFP headquarters suspended all relief flights until further notice. Local WFP director Chris Kaye told us negotiations were ongoing to have the cargo released.

15. (C) The UN reports that relief commodities coming in on regularly scheduled commercial flights are being released with relatively little problem, while commodities arriving on chartered flights are being off-loaded into the Burma Air Force's warehouse at GOB insistence. The UN has observed considerable amounts of donated goods backing up in the warehouse due to the GOB's limited capacity to distribute it. The UN is urgently working to solve this problem, and assured donors today that it would try to track all relief materials coming into the country, including bilateral relief shipments, to make sure it is accounted for and eventually distributed properly. They asked that bilateral donors give them copies of listed donated items so they could track the

RANGOON 00000349 002.2 OF 002

distribution. The WFP is currently trying to negotiate clearance for their planes to land at Patheingyi airport, closer to the affected areas, and bypass the bottleneck caused by GOB's lack of transport capacity.

16. (C) The UN appears to be making headway in moving its personnel into the Delta. The UN told us today they received indication their permanent, international staff would be given permission to travel to the affected areas. Various GOB ministers have been assigned responsibility for specific geographical areas in the Delta, and the UN has begun working with these ministers to negotiate a presence in each place. The Minister of Agriculture has responsibility for Labutta, and granted the UN permission to set up an interagency compound and a communication system there. The UN plans to build off this model to expand its operations into Mon Kyan and Bogalay. The UN plans to assign its local staff to liaison with GOB officials at logistic bases in the Delta. Additionally, the two UNDAC members allowed entry are working with the GOB to establish a joint logistics center near the Rangoon airport.

17. (C) The UN recognizes that GOB cooperation is far short of what should be expected in a catastrophe. Information coming in from their assessors at Haji Island indicates that an additional 100,000 may have died on the island, potentially pushing up the death toll over 200,000. Baker informed the donors it was time for the UN to be more open and frank about the scope of the disaster and the degree to which the GOB was not meeting its responsibility to the people. Following the lead of UN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator John Holmes, other high-level UN officials in New York plan to speak out against the GOB's intransigence. If this fails to yield results, the UN is considering mobilizing every resource they have in country to provide whatever provisions, personnel, and equipment it can to assist in the relief effort.

18. (C) Comment: The GOB lacks the resources and capability to deliver relief where it is urgently and desperately

needed. Its refusal to accept expert assistance, and its efforts to assert control over UN relief supplies, does not give much confidence that assistance will be getting to the 1-2 million victims any time soon. The next week will be a critical test to see if the GOB can come to its senses. Otherwise, it will be responsible for a humanitarian disaster far greater than the damage caused by cyclone Nargis. End comment.

VILLAROSA